

OPENING STATEMENT
BY SENATOR JOHN BREAUX
Saving Our Seniors: Preventing
Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation
June 14, 2001

As my first official act as Chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, I would like to thank Senator Craig for his leadership of the committee during the past several months and to express my sincere appreciation for the bipartisan way in which he has guided the committee's work. The issues that affect our older citizens are truly issues on which we find common ground and I am certain that we will continue to go forward in the same spirit of bipartisanship that has become synonymous with the Special Committee on Aging.

I would also like to thank Senator Craig and his staff for their initiative in putting this hearing on our agenda and for their hard work in preparing for the hearing. While I have the good fortune today to be presiding as Chairman, much of the credit for bringing this important issue to the attention of the Senate and the nation should go to Senator Craig.

Today's hearing, "Saving our Seniors: Preventing Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation," clearly reflects this committee's goal of improving the quality of life of older Americans. We recognize that quality of life is just as important - if not more so - as length of life and we truly understand that one's quality of life depends, among other things, on access to affordable transportation and housing, adequate nutrition and appropriate health care services. But we also know that improving the quality of life of our seniors includes eliminating those conditions that may compromise their safety or endanger their lives. That issue is the focus of our hearing today.

During a recent hearing this committee heard testimony indicating that an astounding 95% of all long term care is provided informally by family members or community-based caregivers - a fact that is both good news and bad news. On a positive note, most of our seniors are cared for in their homes and community-based settings. With that care however, we shift most of the physical, emotional and financial burdens to families who may not have adequate resources to provide that care or to strangers who may not have substantial interest in providing quality assistance. In some cases, family caregivers become overwhelmed by these circumstances and neglect or unintended abuse may occur. Other cases may involve individuals who purposely target seniors for acts of intentional abuse or exploitation. Far too often, these problems go unnoticed and unreported. The victims of abuse, neglect or exploitation are often unable to speak on their own behalf or may have no alternative sources of care. The purpose of today's hearing is to bring awareness and credibility to this problem and to give the members of this committee an opportunity to hear victims of elder abuse and their advocates speak about the causes of these problems and possible means for alleviating this abuse.